

1971(?)

"THE TRIAL OF THE PYX"

Centenary Exhibition.

Catalogue.

Susan M. Hare
librarian, Goldsmiths Hall.

CASE I

From Minting to Pyx. The trial of our coins.

CASE II

1. The earliest surviving trial plate in silver, 1279, showing impressions of dies used in the previous coinage. It is unusual in that it is ingot-shaped, the only trial plate to be so formed.
Prescribed standard: 11 oz 2 dwt. (925 parts silver per 1,000.) Weight: 7.12 oz.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

2. Edward I silver pennies of 1279. The legend on the obverse reads: EDW R ANGL DNS HYB (Edwardus Rex Angliae Dominus Hiberniae).

Lent by Spink & Son Limited.

3. Copy of the indenture between Edward I and William de Turnemire who was appointed Master of the Mint in December 1279. The last sentence shows that he had to place sample coins in Pyx chests which were to be independently checked.

From the Red Book of the Exchequer, Public Record Office.

4. "The history and antiquities of the Exchequer of the Kings of England... from the Norman conquest... to the end of the reign of K. Edward II..." by Thomas Madox, 1711, recounting early trials, including one

of 1318, when the coins were found below standard.

Lent by the Goldsmiths' Library,
London University. Cat. no. 4767.

5. Illustration of the Pyx Chamber, Westminster Abbey. It is known that at least since 1249 this room was used as the Treasury of the Exchequer. It was also used to house the trial plates and testing apparatus, and the monthly pyx chests of coins were stored there until the next Trial of the Pyx.

CASE III

6. The first account of a trial in the Goldsmiths' Company records is of a special one held in Goldsmiths' Hall in 1537, of coins from the Archbishop's mint in Canterbury, on the orders of Thomas Cromwell, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and at the request of Archbishop Cranmer.

7. Henry VIII silver half-groats of the Canterbury Mint c.1533-44, Initial mark: a Catherine wheel, on the obverse. On the reverse the initials TC for (Thomas Cranmer).

Lent by Spink & Son Limited.

8. The Bowes Cup, silver-gilt and rock crystal, 1554. Maker's mark: a crowned monogram (?). Height: 19 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

9. Photographs of two portraits of Sir Martin Bowes.

(a) School of Holbein. Collection of the Hon.
Gladys Saumarez.

- (b) Painter unknown. This portrait hangs in the Court Room at the Hall, and was probably given to the Company by his son Thomas Bowes.

Sir Martin Bowes was first made Prime Warden in 1537 (The year of the trial of coins from the Canterbury Mint), and held this office 13 times in all, 8 more than any other man, before or since. Having served his apprenticeship under Robert Amadas, a Deputy Master of the Mint, he continued to work under him and in 1533 was appointed Master of the Mint, a post he held until 1551.

Bowes was Lord Mayor in 1545 and represented the City of London in Parliament between 1547 and 1559. He is believed to have acted as Cup Bearer to Queen Elizabeth I at her coronation banquet in 1558 and that, as was the custom, she gave him the cup from which she had drunk. In 1561 he gave this cup to the Goldsmiths' Company after having added to the cover a "manykyn" holding a shield bearing his arms. He died in 1566.

CASE IV

On her accession Elizabeth I took active steps to continue the improvements in the standard of the coinage initiated by Edward VI.

10. Gold trial plate of 1560 bearing the inscription "1560
THE * STONDERD * OF CRCUNE * GOLDE * XXII
CARRETTES * FYNE * ". Weight: 2.39 oz.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

11. Silver trial plate of 1560 inscribed "1560 THE * STONERT * OF * SYLVER * XI * OVNCES * II PENNY * WAYGHT * FYNE". Weight: 2.01 oz.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

12. "An account of the assays taken in the Star Chamber before the Queen's most honourable Privy Council the 24th October 1561". An admirably clear account of this trial of the first issue coinage of Elizabeth's reign. This is the earliest full account of a trial in the Goldsmiths' Company records. Note that in this trial Irish money was included.

N.B. "Shere" is the ancient word for what is now called the "remedy" i.e. the tolerance or deviation of coins from the standard weight as permitted by law. "Tale" is the amount reached by counting coins as distinct from weighing them.

13. Elizabeth I gold sovereign of 30/- 1st issue c.1560-61. Initial mark: Crosslet. Obverse: ELIZABETH D G ANG FRA ET HIBE REGINA. Reverse: A DNO FACTU EST ISTUD ET EST MIRA IN OCUL NRIS.

Lent by Spink & Son Limited.

14. Elizabeth I Irish silver shilling dated 1561.

Lent by Spink & Son Limited.

15. Elizabeth I silver three halfpence dated 1561. Initial mark: Pheon.

Lent by Spink & Son Limited.

CASE V.

16. "The Order of the Triall of the Pixes of the Monies in the Realme of England, by the Kings most honourable Councill in the Star Chamber of olde tyme" drawn up by Sir Richard Martin, Warden of the Mint.

Harleian Ms. 698, f.77. Lent by the Trustees of The British Museum.

17. Small painting of Sir Richard Martin, artist unknown. Martin, who was made free of the Goldsmiths' Company in 1555, worked at the sign of the Harp in Goldsmiths' Row and rose to become royal goldsmith to Queen Elizabeth. He served twice as Lord Mayor and was four times Prime Warden of the Goldsmiths' Company. He was first employed at the Mint in 1559, became Warden in 1572 and Master of the Mint in 1581, a post he held until his death in 1617 at the age of 83.

18. Photographic enlargement of the entry in the Court Minutes of Tuesday 9th July 1566 concerning the appointment of the Company's Common Assayer. The post was given to Richard Rogers I, an appointment that caused some embarrassment as he already held the same office at the Mint and it was felt that if a Trial of the Pyx was ordered, he would in effect be testing his own coins. It was hoped that Sir Martin Bowes would advise on this difficult situation but he died in August 1566 before he could be consulted on the matter. Rogers evidently had friends at Court as the Company received a letter from "Mr. Secretary Cecil" on his

behalf, but the Company were finally driven to sack him because he refused to move to the Assayer's quarters in the Hall and conduct his work properly, preferring to carry on his private business from a shop in Goldsmiths' Row.

19. The Rogers Salt, silver-gilt with a rock-crystal cylinder in which is displayed a parchment roll bearing the arms of the Goldsmiths' Company, 1601. Maker's mark: ID and lodged doe in a shaped shield. Height: 22 inches. Inscribed: "The guift of Richard Rogers (Comptroller of His Ma. Mynt) to y Wardens and Comonaltie of y Mistery of Goldsmiths of y Cittie of Lo desiring the same may bee used at their solemne meetinges and to bee remembered as a good Benefactor. Anno Dni 1632".

The younger Richard Rogers was apprenticed to his uncle of the same name in 1566 and obviously trained under him at the Mint. On the death of the latter in 1578 he took over as Assayer, and in 1601 became Comptroller of the Mint, an office he held until 1627. In 1601 he also became Prime Warden of the Goldsmiths' Company and it is perhaps no coincidence that when he decided to present the Company with a fine gift in 1632, he chose a piece which had been made in 1601.

CASE VI

20. "The assay taken in the Star Chamber before the Queen Majesty's most honourable council the 13th day of February 1570." The various pyxes would have contained coins minted since the previous trial of 1561. Court Minute Book, K-L.

21. Elizabeth I gold half-pound, c.1570. Initial mark: castle. Obverse: ELIZABETH D G ANG FRA ET HI REGINA. Reverse: SCUTUM FIDEI PROTEGET EAM.

Lent by Spink & Son Limited.

22. A manuscript written in 1604 by Hannibal Gamon, a London goldsmith, which he has called "A Gouldesmythes Storehouse wherein is layde up manye hidden secretes of that Ingenious Misterie". He goes into some detail in describing the Trial of the Pyx and particularly interesting is his account of the trial for 1601 which besides the usual gold and silver coins, contained "dolars for India voyage and base monyes for the Realme of Ireland".

23. James I silver shilling, c.1604. Initial Mark: Lis. Obverse: crowned bust right: behind XII. Reverse: QUAE DEUS CONNIUNXIT NEMO SEPARET.

Lent by Spink & Son Limited.

CASE VII

24. An anonymous hand-written journal of the early 17th century, formerly in the possession of the Royal Mint, describing the Trial of the Pyx with a full page of drawings of the assay equipment needed.

Lent by the Public Record Office.

25. An account of the Trial for the year 1611 which was attended by King James and his son Prince Henry. It was indeed a rare honour for the King to patronize the proceedings with his presence, the only other monarch known to have done so was Charles I on one occasion.

26. In the first year of the Commonwealth, the Goldsmiths' Company were appointed to prepare new plates of gold and silver, which they delivered in November 1649. On exhibition is the bill of costs for making the plates and for their subsequent testing, £128 : 3 : 6d. in all.

27. Silver Trial Plate of 1649, the largest single portion of the ancient plates in the custody of the Mint, weighing 19.79 oz. It bears the reverse impression of a Commonwealth sixpence and is inscribed: "This standerd comixed of xi ounces ij penny wt: of fine Silver and xvij penny wt: of allaye in the pound wt: troy of England made the xxthij of November 1649".

Lent by the Royal Mint.

28. Commonwealth silver shilling standard type with mark of value XII. Initial mark: Sun. For the first time in the history of the English coinage the inscriptions appear in English instead of Latin, and bears the new legends, THE COMMONWEALTH OF ENGLAND and GOD WITH US.

Lent by Spink & Son Limited.

CASE VIII

29. Court Book open at 13th November 1657 showing the copy of a letter from the Lords Commissioners directing the Wardens of the Goldsmiths' Company to appoint

a jury of 16 "of the ablest and skillfullest of Goldsmiths" to try the Pyx. The Wardens reply and the names of the elected jury follow. On a later page is an account of the assembly for the trial which had to be postponed because two of the trial plates were missing.

30a. Unite, or Commonwealth 20 shilling piece, gold. Initial mark: Sun. Dated 1653.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

30b. Oliver Cromwell crown, gold, dated 1658, with the edge inscribed: "HAS NISI PERITURUS MIHI ADIMAT NEMO".

Lent by the Royal Mint.

30c. Commonwealth silver sixpence dated 1656. Initial mark: Sun.

Lent by Spink & Son Limited.

CASE IX.

31. Book of Precedents written in 1658 by Thomas Jesseline, an official in the Court of the Exchequer, showing the duties of the King's Remembrancer at the Trial of the Pyx.

Lent by the Queen's Remembrancer's Office.

32. Court Book of 1668 showing the copy of a letter from the Lords of the Treasury showing their displeasure that the Goldsmiths' Company had appointed John Brattle, who was already Assayer to the Mint, to be

their Assay Master and "the pyx could not bee tryed while those two places are in one hand." The Company's reply was that the pyx was tried by an independant jury, not the Assay Master, so they could see no reason for him to relinquish his office. However, they bowed to pressure, but asked to be given time to find a suitable replacement.

33. Iron Muffle furnace used by Sir Isaac Newton as Master of the Mint. Newton wrote an immense quantity of material on mint matters which were found in his private residence after his death. Among them was his description of assaying silver coin by cupellation or "trial by fire", a method used by the Mint until 1870.

Lent by the Birmingham Assay Office.

CASE X

34. "Fleta minor. The laws of art and nature, in.... assaying ... refining and enlarging the bodies of confin'd metals... Assays of Lazarus Erckern... translated into English... by Sir John Pettus, 1686." The book is shown open at Chapter XXII, "How coin'd Money in great or small Sorts may be Assayed."
35. An illustration from the above book showing the assaying of silver by burning in a furnace.
36. Letter from Sir Isaac Newton requesting a trial of the Pyx in 1718. Newton was appointed Warden of the Mint in 1696 and Master in 1699, an office he held

until his death, aged 82 in 1727. It was no mere nominal appointment and Newton spent a great deal of time and energy on mint matters. The Mint's reputation of great accuracy and precision was gradually built up during his term of office.

37. Medal of Sir Isaac Newton, by James Anthony Dassier, a Swiss Medalist who was appointed second engraver to the Mint in 1741.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

38. Following Newton's request, the Lord Chancellor, Thomas Parker, Earl of Macclesfield, sends his bidding to the Goldsmiths' Company to nominate the jury for a Trial of the Pyx to take place on 4th August 1718. Until the Coinage Act of 1870, it was the responsibility of the Lord Chancellor to authorize the holding of the trials and to preside over them.
39. The diagram for the standard trial plates of gold and silver made in 1707 which would normally have been used at the trial of 1718. These diagrams were always made first, with indented shapes drawn in which served as rough patterns for cutting up the newly-made trial plates into seven pieces which were divided for safe keeping between the Exchequer, the Mint and the Goldsmiths' Company. Before any trial, all the parts would be brought together to see if they fitted to prove their authenticity. At the trial, small portions of the gold and silver would be cut from one or other of the plates and assayed at the same time as the coins.

40. Gold standard plate of 1688 bearing the reverse impression of a guinea of James II's reign.
Prescribed standard: 22ct. (916.6)
Actual standard: gold 914.6, silver & copper 85.4.
41. Gold standard plate of 1707 with the reverse impression of a half-guinea.
Prescribed standard: 22ct. (916.6)
Actual standard: gold 917.1, silver 59.5, copper 23.4.
Inscribed: This standard comixed of XXII carretts of Fine Gold and II carretts of Allay in the Pound wt. Troy of Great Britain made the 25th of June 1707. This was used for the trial of 1710 when the Jury insisted on finding the coin $\frac{1}{4}$ dwt. (just over 1 part per 1,000) below standard in spite of Newton's protests that the plate was appreciably finer than preceeding plates owing to the recent, and not fully appreciated advances in the art of purifying gold. At all following trials in the eighteenth century the 1688 plate was used instead, which explains why so little of it remains.
42. Silver trial plate of 1707 bearing the reverse impression of a Queen Anne sixpence.
Prescribed standard: 11 oz. 2 dwt. (925)
43. George I gdd $\frac{1}{4}$ guinea dated 1718. This was a new denomination issued for the first time in that year but it did not prove a popular coin being inconvenient

to handle and too easily lost owing to its small size. It was not reissued, therefore, during this reign. George I has his English titles on the obverse and his German titles on the reverse.

Lent by Spink & Son Limited.

44. An account of the trial of 1718.
45. The Beadle's "computation" for the dinner of 4th August 1718, held after the trial.
46. Robert Walpole, reappointed Chancellor of the Exchequer on the accession of King George II in 1727, ordered new trial plates to be made for testing the gold and silver coinage. On show are the original order, signed by Walpole and the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury, and the Goldsmiths' reply with the names of the jury.
47. 22ct gold medal of Robert Walpole, Earl of Orford (1676-1745), by Stuart Devlin. One of a set of medals of six famous Prime Ministers of Great Britain issued in 1966.
48. Three portions of the silver trial plate made to Walpole's orders in 1728 showing how they fitted together. Each bears the impression of a George II sixpence reverse and a dated inscription. No further trial plates were made for over a hundred years.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

49. Inventory of trial plates held by the Goldsmiths' Company dated 20th December 1728. The weights of each were recorded and they were "put into the Box with the Common Seal". All earlier trial plates had been lost in a fire which destroyed the Assay Office in 1681 (the same fire which destroyed the records of maker's marks), so the 1688 plates are the earliest in their possession.
50. The Common Seal of the Goldsmiths' Company, 1667 which replaced one lost in the Great Fire the previous year. This seal continued in use until 1954.
51. Mahogany brass-bound box in which the trial plates were formerly stored for safe keeping at Goldsmiths' Hall.

CASE XI

52. On 25th January 1816 a special jury was assembled at Goldsmiths' Hall "on a very peculiar and extraordinary occasion", namely, in order to hold a trial of certain French gold coins struck at the London Mint with the consent and approbation of King Louis XVIII.
- Shown here is the charge made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nicholas Vansittart (later first Baron Bexley) in which he explains that with the return of Napoleon from Elba it was felt that an adequate supply of French money would be essential to pay the British troops

stationed in France. Therefore, 870.346 Louis d'Or were struck between 7th June and 31st October 1815. Trial pieces were placed in the Pyx as usual and were assayed, not against trial plates, but against a number of legal gold monies of France, produced by the French Ambassador.

53. Letter from the Chancellor of the Exchequer offering the Goldsmiths' Company a copy of his historic charge.
54. Court Minute Book of 5th January 1816 recording the request for the special trial of French monies.
55. Letter from William Wellesley Pole, Master of the Mint with arrangements for the special trial and for the dinner afterwards. He mentions that the French Ambassador would be bringing to the trial, at the request of the Treasury, 58 Louis d'Or, legal French coins, that would be melted down and tested against the coins from the Mint.
- 55a. William Wellesley Pole, later 3rd Earl of Mornington, elder brother of the Duke of Wellington, Master of the Mint 1814-23. Liveryman of the Goldsmiths' Company 1828-45. Picture of a bronze medal by Benedetto Pistrucci.
56. Gold Louis d'Or of 1815, minted in London. These coins reproduced the French 20 franc piece of 1814 with absolute fidelity in fineness and weight; in design the name of the Paris engraver was omitted, the mint

marks altered and the date changed to 1815. These coins later caused great trouble in France where they were seized as counterfeit. "His Most Christian Majesty Louis XVIII", having given permission for the coining, failed to circulate this fact in his own country.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

57. Cream Jug, 1818, London. Maker: Crespin Fuller. Silver with gold panels. Inscription on the gold panels reads: "Made from the Gold and Silver used on Trial of the Pyx, July 27th 1818. Gold coined from June 4th 1817 to June 13th 1818 7,137717£ - silver 4,646070£." The history of this jug before it was given to the Goldsmiths' Company in 1928 is not known. A letter from the Clerk in 1880 (item 66) expresses his horror at the discovery that the Company's assayers had for some time past been taking a large portion of the ingot made from the melted coins as their perquisite and it is likely that one of them had the jug made up as a souvenir.

58. "The Morning Post" of Friday, March 15th 1836. In the account we read that the foreman of the jury suggested that the actual trial of the coins should be made at Goldsmiths' Hall. At the very next trial, held in 1842, this was done for the first time and so the trial continued in two separate parts until the 1871 Order in Council established that the entire proceedings should take place in the Hall. Previously it had been held in various rooms in the Exchequer building, and before that in the Star Chamber at Westminster.

59. Report to the Comptroller General of the Exchequer upon the Trial of the Pyx and Coinage, February 1846 showing copies of correspondence relating to the transfer of assay to Goldsmiths' Hall, and a full description of the process.

Lent by the Queen's Remembrancer's Office.

60. Drawing of the jury taking the oath at a Trial of the Pyx before the seated Lord Chancellor, when it was held in the old Exchequer Office, from the Illustrated London News of December 1854.

CASE XII

61. The Coinage Act, 1870. Among its clauses, it provided for an annual Trial of the Pyx, and laid down that the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the time being should be the master, worker and Warden of the Royal Mint.
62. Order in Council, 29th June 1871. Following the Coinage Act of 1870, this laid down that the annual trial should take place in Goldsmiths' Hall, and should be presided over by the Queen's Remembrancer.
63. Correspondence between the Treasury and the Goldsmiths' Company concerning arrangements for the first trial at Goldsmiths' Hall following the Coinage Act, 1870.

Lent by the Public Record Office.

CASE XIII

64. Letter dated 3rd May 1872 from the Warden of the Standards (Standards Department of the Board of Trade) requesting that new trial plates should be made at once. The previous gold trial plate of 1829 had been 1.3 parts per 1,000 below the prescribed standard.

Lent by the Public Record Office.

65. 1873 Trial Plate, pure gold, dated 22nd December 1873. Sir William Roberts-Austen, the newly appointed "Chemist of the Mint" wrote "I have not been able to prepare, or to obtain from any source, gold of greater purity, even in small quantities."

66. Two standard gold trial plates, dated 22nd December 1873. Prescribed standard: 22ct. (916.6)
Actual standard: gold 916.61, copper 83.39.

One lent by the Royal Mint.

67. Standard silver trial plate dated 22nd December 1873. Prescribed standard: 11 oz 2 dwt. (925)
Actual standard: silver 924.96, copper 75.04.
All these plates bear the obverse and reverse of the Standards Department of the Board of Trade seal.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

68. Letter dated 15th July 1880, from the Clerk of the Goldsmiths' Company explaining why they were returning a cheque for expenses for the recent trial, as they had long since declined to receive any payment from the government.

Lent by the Public Record Office.

69. "The London Gazette" of Friday 21st September 1900, making provisions for the branch mint "near Sydney in Our Colony of New South Wales."

70. After considerable correspondence it was decided that the Trial of the Pyx should be extended to cover coins from all the branch mints, and the Goldsmiths' Company expressed concern at the obvious lengthening of the trial, that the work of assaying the coins would continue over the one day and might interfere with the regular work of the Assay Office. On exhibition is a letter dated 29th January 1901, from Sir Edward Hamilton, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, about the new arrangements.

71. "An account of the gold moneys coined and delivered at the Perth Branch of the Royal Mint... and of pieces deposited in the pyx, from the first day of April 1900 to the 31st of March 1901." From 1901 the trials included coins from the branch mints at Perth, Sydney, Melbourne and Bombay.

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72. The Pyx used at Goldsmiths' Hall to contain the small boxes of coins from the colonial mints. These boxes (two of which are on display) held the actual coins to be assayed.
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CASE XIV.

73. £5 piece in gold, pattern, showing Una and the Lion on the reverse. Dated 1839. At the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign a new coinage was obviously needed. Among the various designs submitted was this attractive piece by William Wyon which was not adopted for general circulation but a considerable number were struck from the dies, and became collector's pieces.
74. Half-sovereigns, 1839. One of the new "young head" coins with the Queen's portrait engraved by William Wyon. The reverse shows a crowned shield.
75. Gothic crowns, 1847. A new pattern prepared by William Wyon which is said to have delighted Queen Victoria. A limited number were brought out in 1847, possibly as a commemorative issue to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Queen Victoria's accession, and it is doubtful if they were ever intended for general circulation.
76. Obverse and reverse dies for the 1847 crown.
77. Bronze pennies, 1861, designed by Leonard Wyon. New bronze coinage was introduced to replace the previous heavyweight copper issue. This was made of a copper alloy having a small percentage of tin and zinc to make the metal more durable so that the coins could remain in circulation for a much longer period. They are smaller and thinner than the copper coins. Although the Queen was now forty, she was still depicted as a young woman and because her wreathed hair is coiled into a bun at the back, the popular name for these became "Bun" pennies.

78. Bronze farthings, 1861.
79. Britannia groats, silver, 1862 proof pieces. First introduced in 1836, the coin was later discontinued in favour of the threepenny piece. Unlike the bronze coins, Britannia appears alone without ship or lighthouse.
80. Bronze halfpennies, 1864.
81. Silver sixpences, 1864.
82. Silver half-crowns, 1864.
83. Silver shillings, 1866.
84. Two Maundy Sets of 1866, each comprising silver 4d, 3d, 2d, and 1d.

Item numbers 73 - 84 all lent by the Royal Mint.

85. Carved cane-back arm chair and footstool, used in the first half of the 19th century by successive Lord Chancellors when conducting the Trial of the Pyx. The Privy Council were summoned to be present at the Trial which was presided over by the Lord Chancellor in the Exchequer Office until its abolition in 1866. The Lord Chancellor's chair, together with the Standards Office then came under the Board of Trade.

Lent by the Department of Trade & Industry
in conjunction with the Department of the Environment.

CASE XV

86. Gold sovereigns, 1871. In this year, Pistrucci's St. George reverse was re-introduced and for four years coins of this type and of the shield type were issued concurrently, the latter then being discontinued.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

87. Silver crown, 1897, "old head", designed by Thomas Brock in 1893 to replace the unsatisfactory golden jubilee designs of Sir Joachim Boehm. The IND IMP draws attention to the fact that the Queen was now Empress of India. She had been proclaimed Empress in 1877 but the title had not hitherto been added to the coinage.

88. Florin, 1902, silver, designed by G. W. de Saulles, a coin which met with considerable approval. It shows a wind-swept Britannia with trident and shield, standing on the prow of a ship.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

89. Jubilee crown, 1935, gold. The reverse was designed by Percy Metcalfe and shows a bareheaded St. George on a large horse trampling on a very angular dragon. The modernistic treatment of the design provoked much comment at the time. There was a special issue of only 25 struck in gold.

90. Coronation coins, 1953, gold. £5, £2, £1, and 10/-. Only four sets were minted.

91. Coronation set, 1953. (10 coins)

92. Sovereign, 1957, gold. Presented to the Goldsmiths' Company by Lord Amory, now second Warden, when as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Master of the Mint, he attended the Trial of the Pyx in 1958.

93. Maundy Set, 1971, silver.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

CASE XVI

94. Copy of "The Standard of Weights and Measures in the Exchequer, Anno 12 Henrici Septimi (1496)." The original table formerly hung on a wall of the Star Chamber in Westminster where the early Trials of the Pyx took place. It shows that the wheat ear was used as the standard unit for weighing coinage. The Act of 12 Henry 7 stated that "... every pound contain xii ounces of Troy weight, and every ounce contain xx sterlings, and every sterling be of the weight of xxxij corns of wheat that grew in the midst of the ear of wheat, according to the old law of the land".

Lent by the Standard Weights & Measures Department,
of the Department of Trade & Industry.

95. Pile of Troy Weights, 1588. During Queen Elizabeth I's reign great efforts were made to improve the standard of weights which were in general found to be very faulty.

The first step was to make the troy standards to agree with the "true proportion of the pile of standard remaining in Goldsmiths' Hall to size all other weights by". By Royal Proclamation, December 1587, new standards of troy and avoirdupois weight were legalized. By 1588, 57 sets of the new standards were completed and distributed to various towns and cities, also the Tower of London, the Goldsmiths' Company and the Queen's Hospital.

CASE XVII

The establishment of a decimal coinage has long had its advocates in this country.

96. Sir William Petty's "Quantulumcunque concerning money" written in 1682, argued in favour of a system which would make it possible "to keep all Accounts in a way of Decimal Arithmetick". Published 1695.

Lent by the Goldsmiths' Library,
London University. Cat. no. 3149.

97. Recoinage of 1696, manuscript volume open at Sir Christopher Wren's "Proposal".

Lent by the Goldsmiths' Library,
London University, Ms. Vol. 62.

By the 1690's the depreciated state of the silver currency made it necessary to undertake a wholesale renewal of the coinage. Sir Christopher Wren saw in this an opportunity for introducing a decimal system of coinage.

98. A printed treatise on the introduction of decimal money dated 1841, based on the pound sterling to consist of 1,000 farthings.

Lent by the Public Record Office.

99. Florin, 1848, reverse inscription: ONE FLORIN. ONE TENTH OF A POUND.

This coin was the first step taken towards decimalization. It was intended to replace the half-crown, so the larger coin was not issued between 1850 and 1874. It was re-introduced, however at the request of the banks. On the obverse of the new florin, the usual words "Dei Gratia" were omitted, so the coin became known as the "Godless" florin. The Queen is said to have been scandalized at the omission and the issue was soon withdrawn.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

100. Gothic florin, 1862. By 1851 the amended design appeared and gained the name "Gothic" florin because of the reversion to a medieval type of lettering.

Lent by the Royal Mint.

101. Warrant of 1 November 19 Victoria (1855) appointing a Royal Commission to inquire into "the expediency of introducing the decimal division into the coinage of our United Kingdom".

Lent by the Public Record Office.

102. Set of decimal coins 1857 and 1859. These decimal patterns were made by the Royal Mint in anticipation of a change to a decimal coinage for which there had been much demand during the past 20 years. There was also a growing demand for smaller, or at any rate, lighter coins, and judging by the various colours of the metals used for many of these patterns, it is obvious that several experimental bronze alloys were tried out. Many of the dies for these pieces are believed to have been engraved by James Wyon.

Lent by the Bank of England.

The Final Report of the Royal Commission which appeared in 1859, concluded that "... it does not appear desirable, under existing circumstances, while our weights and measures remain as at present, and so long as the principle on which their simplification ought to be founded is undetermined, to disturb the established habits of the people with regard to the coins now in use, by a partial attempt to introduce any new principle into the coinage alone".

103. Lord Southwark's decimal coinage bill of 1918, based on the system of 1,000 "mils" to the sovereign.

Lent by the Public Record Office.

104. Later the same year Lord Leverhulme introduced a decimal coinage bill based on the halfpenny unit to be named "royals".

Lent by the Public Record Office.

Neither bill was enacted as "the introduction of such a change would be inexpedient at a time when the social, industrial and financial organisation of the country will be faced with numerous and exceptional difficulties" (from the Final Report of the Committee on Commercial and Industrial Policy after the War).

The Royal Commission on Decimal Coinage, 1918-20 found in its majority report that it was "not advisable to make any change in the denomination of the currency and money of account of the United Kingdom with a view to placing them on a decimal basis".

105. Decimal Currency Act, 1967. It is interesting to note that in this act, and in the current bill before Parliament, provision is made for the continuation of the Trial of the Pyx.

Any exhibits without acknowledgment belong to the Goldsmiths' Company.

104. Later the same year Lord Leverhulme introduced a decimal coinage bill based on the halfpenny which he named "royals". The bill was passed in 1901 and is now in the Public Record Office.

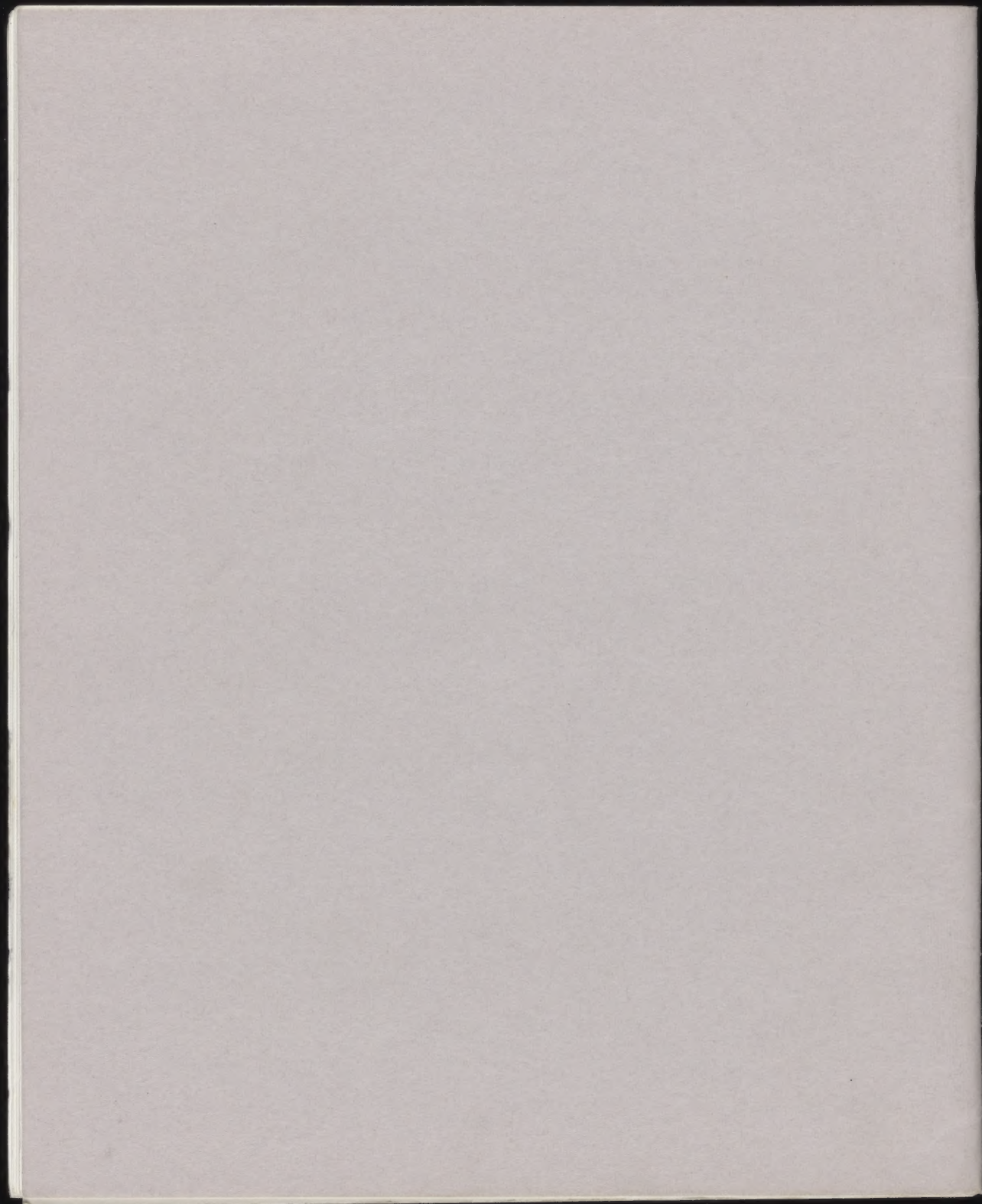
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no board, first in the opinion of the Goldsmiths' Company and afterwards of the "Pyx" which is always held.



centenary exhibition

The triall of the Pix

Goldsmiths' Hall Foster Lane London EC2

10 May to 14 May 10am till 5pm

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*This Standard comixed of
XXII Carretts of Fine Gold
and II Carretts of Allay
in the Pound w^t Troy
of Great Brittain made
the 25th of June, 1707.*



Trial of the Pyx

The proceeding known as The Trial of the Pyx is an examination by a jury to check that gold, silver and cupro-nickel coins made by the Royal Mint are of the correct weight, size and metallic content.

This trial is carried out annually by the Goldsmiths' Company of the City of London. Since 1870, under the Coinage Acts, Officers of the Mint are required to place in the Pyx (or Mint Box) certain specimen coins issued from the Mint for examination by a jury of members of the Company who are specially sworn by the Queen's Remembrancer in accordance with directions issued by the Treasury.

The Trial of the Pyx is of very ancient origin, for there is reason to believe that an examination of the justness of the coinage of this country by assay and comparison with trial plates was practised as early as Saxon - or perhaps even Roman - times, and there is record of a public trial in the year 1248 before the Barons of the Exchequer by a jury of twelve discreet and lawful Citizens of London with skilful Goldsmiths of the same place.

For many centuries the trial took place in Westminster before the Lord Chancellor and the Lords of the Council, but an Order in Council of June 1871, following the Coinage Act of 1870, laid down that future trials should be held in Goldsmiths' Hall and that the Queen's Remembrancer should preside. Thus 1971 is the 100th anniversary of the first trial held at Goldsmiths' Hall, and a special exhibition to mark the occasion will be open to the public from 10th to 14th May 1971.

The exhibition will include documents, coins, trial plates and other items of interest which trace the history of the trial from 1279 to the present day.

The earliest exhibit will be the silver ingot-shaped plate of 1279. There will be an account of the 1537 trial of coins from the Archbishop's mint in Canterbury. Also on show will be Sir Isaac Newton's "muffle furnace" which he used when assaying as Master of the Mint 1699-1727.

A small section of the exhibition will deal with a topical subject - decimalisation. It is not generally known that there have been several earlier attempts - albeit half hearted ones - to convert to decimal currency. The earliest referred to in the exhibition is Sir William Petty's advocacy of 1682.

These and many other exhibits illustrate a fascinating but little known aspect of British history which will be of interest to scholar and layman alike.

The Goldsmiths' Company are grateful to the following organisations who have loaned exhibits:- The Assay Office, Birmingham, The Bank of England, The British Museum, The Department of Trade and Industry, The Public Record Office, The Queen's Remembrancer's Office, The Royal Mint, Spink and Son Limited, and the University of London Library.